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USSR-NATO: The Soviets have clarified their position on European security and force reductions.

Soviet officials in at least two capitals, Washington and Vienna, have presented their host governments with memoranda defining the Soviet position. In a meeting with Secretary Rogers on 14 July, Soviet Ambassador Dobrynin read a statement that reiterated the view that only "foreign" troops should be considered in possible talks on balanced force reductions in Europe. According to Austrian officials, Deputy Foreign Minister Semenov--the leader of the Soviet SALT delegation--recently presented the Austrians with a similar memorandum, adding that he was doing so on "instructions from Moscow."

The Soviets are showing more flexibility, however, concerning the appropriate forum for negotiations on force reductions. In addition to mentioning the suggestion made by the Warsaw Pact last month that force reductions could be considered in a standing committee to be established at a conference, Dobrynin indicated that discussion of troop reductions might be taken up outside the conference framework. He referred approvingly to "experience gained between the USSR and the US" in similar negotiations in other matters, an apparent hint that the Soviets might consider bilateral talks. Dobrynin thus did not foreclose the possibility of talks on this subject before a conference.

Dobrynin's suggestion that balanced force reductions could be handled in bilateral talks was advanced more directly earlier this week by a Polish deputy foreign minister. However, unlike the Pole, Dobrynin did not explicitly say that talks on force reductions could precede a security conference. Moscow's appearance of being more forthcoming than heretofore on the issue of force reductions probably stems from its interest in gaining Western acceptance of a conference on European security.

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